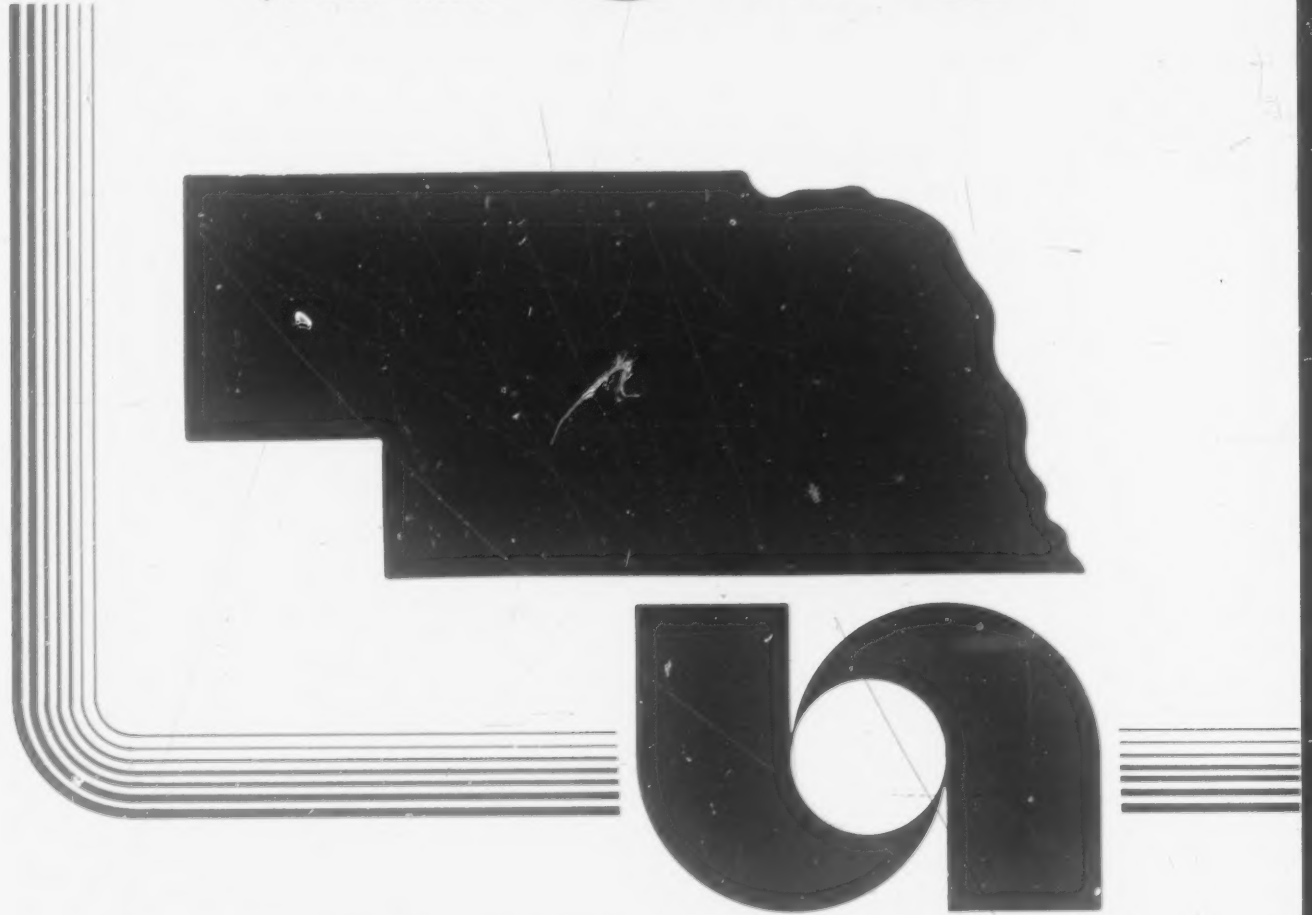


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THE NEW RELIGIOUS RIGHT: AN
EXAMINATION OF THE VALUE
DISLOCATION HYPOTHESIS

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THE NEW RELIGIOUS RIGHT: AN EXAMINATION
OF THE VALUE DISLOCATION HYPOTHESIS

For the past several years, conservative and fundamentalist religious groups have been experiencing considerable growth, largely at the expense of the mainline Protestant denominations. At the same time, pressures have been exerted on leaders of the mainline bodies to move toward a more conservative position on such social issues as abortion, gun control, voluntary prayer in the public schools, and the teaching of scientific creationism as an alternative to the theory of evolution.

Much of the impetus for the resurgence of fundamentalism has come from a number of evangelical media ministries, the most influential of which is probably the Old-Time Gospel Hour, the Rev. Jerry Falwell's vehicle for disseminating the views of the Moral Majority. Like much of the "New Religious Right," Falwell forges a strong link between religion and politics. During the 1980 national election, the Moral Majority targeted several liberal legislators for defeat. After the election, they claimed that:

... it was the evangelical tv preachers who played a decisive role. Not only did they elect Ronald Reagan to the presidency, but ... they also managed to unseat a number of liberal Senators through a massive, well-financed campaign to brand their targets as un-Christian political sinners. This campaign mobilized a funda-

mentalist constituency which was a decisive factor in the conservative tide that swept the nation (Gannon, 1981: 2).

Harper and Leicht (1982; cf. Gannon, 1981) argue that the New Religious Right has had less political impact than its adherents claim. From their perspective, the swing toward conservatism during the 1980s "extends far beyond the evangelical camp which is presumed to be the locus of support for the New Religious Right" (Harper and Leicht, 1982: 1).

This paper examines the extent to which members of a random sample of Nebraskans support the Moral Majority and its positions on several social issues. In the first part of the analysis, our concern is with whether the Moral Majority and those who support its views indeed constitute a majority of the population, and, if so, on what issues. We then turn to a consideration of the extent to which conservative positions on social issues reflect membership in the evangelical and fundamentalist religious bodies whose theological doctrines are most consonant with those preached by the television evangelists. Finally, we examine the hypothesis that support for the New Religious Right comes primarily from those segments of the population which have been experiencing what Gannon (1981) calls "value dislocations."

Support for the radical right has historically been centered in the "dispossessed" (Bell, 1962), groups of people who see their way of life vanishing as a result of modernism in dress, speech,

religion, and sexual relations. If the Moral Majority fits the historical pattern, its adherents and those who support its stands on the issues should come disproportionately from those groups most threatened by the social changes of the recent past (e.g., urbanization, detente, changes in family structure and sex roles). Demographically, the historical record suggests that the disposed are concentrated among the elderly, persons living in rural areas and small towns, and those with lower levels of education and economic attainment. Attitudinally, they should be those who feel that their lot in life is getting worse. For example, they may feel that their economic prospects are deteriorating or that it is more dangerous to go out on the streets than it used to be.

DATA AND METHOD

The data were drawn from the 1982 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey. A statewide sample (N=1843) of non-institutionalized persons aged 18 or above was selected by random digit dialing procedures and interviewed by telephone. Although the interviews covered many aspects of the quality of life, the items of interest for this analysis include those dealing with (1) religious preference, (2) demographic variables, (3) a series of questions about knowledge of and support for the Moral Majority and its stands on the issues of the equal rights amendment, school

prayer, the teaching of creationism, sex education in the public schools, governmental regulation of pornography, military spending, gun control, and abortion, and (4) an item designed to measure Biblical literalism.

FINDINGS

We first looked at the extent of knowledge and support for the Moral Majority indicated by the respondents. Approximately 56 percent of the sample indicated that they had ever heard or read of the Moral Majority. Of those 1071 respondents who had heard of the group, 23 percent (244 respondents) indicated general approval for the organization and its goals. Another 26 percent indicated that they did not know whether they approved or disapproved, but had in fact heard of the organization. The majority of respondents who had heard of the Moral Majority (51 per cent) "mostly disapproved" of the organization and its goals. Out of the total sample of respondents, only 12.8 per cent indicated that they "mostly approved" of the Moral Majority.

Table 1 indicates that a majority of Nebraskans have heard of the Moral Majority (56.2 percent). However, respondents who are male, residents of Lincoln, aged 25 to 40 or members of a true sect are more likely to have heard or read about the Moral Majority. Interestingly, the groups most likely to have heard of the organization are those respondents with the highest educational achievements.

Approval of the Moral Majority varies considerably among Nebraskans, and this variation is significantly related to religious preference and residence. Those most likely to approve are members of the true sects and rural non-farm residents.

Next we examined respondents' agreement or disagreement with a series of political/religious issues that are generally associated with the Moral Majority. These "issue" questions were asked of all respondents, including those who had never heard or read of the Moral Majority. Table 2 presents the percent of respondents who strongly agreed with the Moral Majority position on each issue.

Overall, the position of the Moral Majority was supported by the greatest percentage of respondents on the issues of pornography (27 percent), military spending (15.4 percent), gun control (14.3 percent) and the literal interpretation of the Bible (13.9 percent). It should be restated that these percentages of support reflect only those Nebraskans who indicated "strong" support for the Moral Majority stance on these issues.

We next examined the extent to which support for the Moral Majority is related to respondent religion, sex, residence, education and age. The data in Table 2 indicate the percent support among these groups. An analysis of variance among the groups was conducted to indicate those groups which differed significantly in their responses to each item after controlling for respondent age and educational level.

RELIGION

Given the tie of the Moral Majority to fundamentalist religious groups in the United States, we examined the relationship of religious background to support of the Moral Majority. Responses were assigned to the following categories: Catholic, Protestant, Established Sects (e.g. Baptist), True sects (e.g., Jehovah's Witness) and "No Religious Preference."

Support for the Moral Majority position was strongest in most cases among persons preferring Established Sects and True Sects (as opposed to Catholics and the mainline Protestant denominations). This cluster of support did, however, vary significantly on two issues: school prayer and gun control. Respondents from the True Sects showed significantly higher support of school prayer than any other group, including the Established Sects. In addition, sectarians were significantly more likely to strongly disagree with gun control, while those from Established Sects were as likely to agree with gun control as any other religious preference group. Only one Moral Majority issue - increased military spending - is unrelated to respondent religious preference.

SEX

Men and women differed significantly in their support for a number of Moral Majority issues. Men gave stronger support for increased military spending and significantly stronger disapproval of strict gun control laws. In contrast, women gave significantly stronger support for the elimination of pornography. After age and educational levels were controlled, women also gave

significantly less support than men to defeat of the equal rights ammendment. No significant differences were found between men and women on attitudes toward abortion, support for teaching creationism or sex education, or for school prayer.

RESIDENCE

It has been suggested that rural and urban differences may differentiate respondent support of the Moral Majority as significantly as religious preference. Respondents were categorized into rural farm, rural non-farm and urban areas by their own descriptions. In addition, we separated out from the urban category respondents who lived in Omaha or Lincoln. Interestingly, residence is related significantly to Moral Majority support on most issues examined. However, after controlling for education and age, support for Moral Majority positions on abortion, pornography and school prayer by rural respondents is not significantly different from that of urban respondents.

On only one issue did rural/urban attitudes split along "traditional" lines: gun control. Both farm and non-farm rural residents strongly opposed gun control legislation, while Lincoln and Omaha residents showed generally low support for the Moral Majority stance on this issue. This split may well reflect the distinction between the problems of large urban areas created by hand guns and the needs of rural areas for recreational and sport use of rifles and guns.

Lincoln respondents are in many ways different from other residence groups. Lincoln residents were significantly less

likely to support Moral Majority positions on the equal rights ammendment, military spending, sex education in the public schools, teaching creationism, pornography and belief in the Bible as the literal word of God.

EDUCATION

Next, we examined educational differences in support for the various Moral Majority positions. Respondents were categorized according to their level of educational attainment (less than high school, high school graduate, community college graduate, or 4-year college degree and above). Aside from the issues of the equal rights ammendment and gun control, there are significant differences between these groups. Generally, those with higher educational levels are significantly less likely to support the position of the Moral Majority in the areas of abortion, military spending, school prayer, sex education, the teaching of creationism and the belief that the Bible is the literal word of God.

AGE

Age is consistently related to approval of the Moral Majority position on the issues of the equal rights ammendment, sex education, school prayers, pornography and the literal interpretation of the Bible. In each instance, respondents in the 56-and-over age group were significantly more likely than those under 40 to support the Moral Majority position. The 41-to-55 year old group showed greater approval of the Moral Majority

stance on these issues, as well, although the differences were not always significant.

CONCLUSIONS

These findings indicate that the Moral Majority platform on political and religious issues receives varied support among Nebraskans. In general, religious background is consistently related to the degree of support, with fundamentalist sects providing the greatest support across all issues.

The analysis presents some detailed findings on how these patterns of support differ from one population group to another. The notion that those people most "disaffected" by modern, secular change are most likely to support conservative religious platforms is substantially supported by the following findings:

- Consistently strong support of Moral Majority issues by older Nebraskans, those with lower educational achievements, and those belonging to fundamentalist religious sects.
- Rural and urban differences in support of the Moral Majority were not as distinct as expected. Gun control was the only issue to split rural and urban residents along traditional lines. Lincoln respondents are the most distinct geographic group in the state, showing greater disapproval of a number of Moral Majority positions than residents of either Omaha or smaller communities.

Table 1

KNOWLEDGE AND APPROVAL OF MORAL MAJORITY

	HEARD/READ ABOUT N.M.	MOSTLY APPROVE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
SEX			
MALE	61.8	14.0	914
FEMALE	51.3	11.7	986
RELIGION			
CATHOLIC	51.0	10.0	485
PROTESTANT	57.0	11.2	987
ESTAB. SECTS	52.0	17.5	160
TRUE SECTS	64.2	33.8	68
NONE	68.2	6.5	93
RESIDENCE			
RURAL FARM	51.6	12.2	288
RURAL NON-FARM	59.6	19.3	119
URBAN	50.9	11.9	877
LINCOLN	74.3	12.6	167
OMAHA	62.7	13.7	446
EDUCATION			
< HIGH SCHOOL	28.5	7.2	343
HIGH SCHOOL	55.2	12.7	1151
JUNIOR COLLEGE	68.0	24.2	95
BACHELOR'S (+)	87.8	16.4	311
AGE			
18-24	54.0	12.7	322
25-40	65.6	14.8	623
41-55	58.3	12.6	435
56+	44.9	10.5	515
TOTAL	56.2	12.8	1907

Table 2

PERCENT "STRONGLY AGREE" WITH MORAL MAJORITY POSITION

	EQ. RTS. AMEND.	SCHOOL PRAYER	PORNO- GRAPHY	MILITARY SPENDING
SEX				
MALE	12.2	5.1	19.7*	17.4*
FEMALE	10.4	5.7	33.5	13.4
RELIGION				
CATHOLIC	9.5*	3.9*	27.3*	15.8
PROTESTANT	9.8	4.8	25.5	14.6
ESTABLISHED SECTS	21.5	7.0	33.0	15.3
TRUE SECTS	21.4	17.8	40.8	14.4
NONE	2.4	1.6	5.8	11.0
RESIDENCE				
RURAL FARM	11.3*	3.2	25.8	14.0*
RURAL NON-FARM	25.4	6.0	25.1	15.1
URBAN	10.7	6.3	29.8	16.5
LINCOLN	5.7	2.9	18.6	6.2
OMAHA	10.9	6.0	25.3	17.4
EDUCATION				
< HIGH SCHOOL	8.4	9.7*	30.5*	14.6*
HIGH SCHOOL	11.5	5.1	28.5	16.5
JUNIOR COLLEGE	16.1	5.7	19.5	19.0
B.A.+	12.1	2.1	19.5	10.9
AGE				
18-24	6.3*	3.0*	14.4*	15.9
25-40	10.1	3.9	18.7	14.5
41-55	13.2	6.1	32.7	15.1
56+	15.2	8.2	39.9	16.4
TOTAL PERCENT	11.3	5.4	27.0	15.4

* Differences among or between groups in this category are significant beyond the .05 level, controlling for education and age.

Table 2 (CONTINUED)

	CREA- TIONISM	LITER- ALISM	SEX EDUCATION	GUN CONTROL	GOV'T AND ABORTION
SEX					
MALE	11.0	13.3	6.0	20.2	6.6
FEMALE	12.3	14.1	5.7	9.0	8.5
RELIGION					
CATHOLIC	10.0*	9.1*	5.8*	11.4*	10.1*
PROTESTANT	9.1	121.1	4.3	14.9	5.1
ESTAB. SECTS	19.0	23.3	8.7	10.5	12.2
TRUE SECTS	39.2	47.7	18.1	24.2	17.4
NONE	6.0	6.5	1.1	8.5	2.4
RESIDENCE					
RURAL	13.3*	16.6*	7.0*	22.7*	5.8*
RURAL NON-FARM	19.1	18.8	7.8	24.9	11.7
URBAN	11.8	15.1	6.1	14.5	7.6
LINCOLN	6.9	8.0	3.5	8.7	5.5
OMAHA	10.4	10.7	5.0	8.1	8.4
EDUCATION					
< HIGH SCHOOL	12.2*	17.9*	8.8*	9.7	10.0*
HIGH SCHOOL	12.4	14.6	5.7	15.5	7.5
JUNIOR COLLEGE	13.2	15.5	4.3	12.0	5.5
BACHELOR'S (+)	8.2	6.7	3.6	15.6	5.7
AGE					
18-24	10.7	14.0*	2.1*	12.8	6.1
25-40	11.2	13.3	3.8	15.7	8.0
41-55	13.6	15.7	7.0	14.2	8.7
56+	11.0	12.8	10.1	13.8	7.0
TOTAL PERCENT	11.7	13.9	5.9	14.3	7.6

* Differences among or between categories are significant beyond the .05 level, controlling for education and age.

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List of reports already released using data gathered in the 1982 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey. These may be purchased at the indicated price from the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Report Number	Title
1	Designs, Procedures, Instruments and Forms for the 1982 NASIS. Helen A. Moore. Price: \$7.50.
2	Attitudes Toward Social Security. Warren Luckner. Price: \$1.25.
3	Community Colleges and Higher Education. Helen A. Moore. Price: \$1.00.
4	The Status of Older Nebraskans. Jane C. Ollenburger and the Bureau of Sociological Research. Price: \$1.50.
5	Social Responses to Scarcity. Alan Booth. Price: \$1.00.
6	A Look At Nebraskans' Favorite Outdoor Recreational Activities. David R. Johnson and Laurie K. Scheuble. Price: \$.75.
7	Social Security and Government Spending. The Elderly Speak Out. Jane C. Ollenburger and the Bureau of Sociological Research. Price: \$.75.
8	Support for Programs Related to Alcohol Problems. Helen A. Moore. Price: \$.75.
9	Nebraskans and Health Risks: Social Indicators of Health Status. Stephanie L. Shank and Richard L. Meile. Price: \$.75.
10	Nebraskans' Views on Public Welfare Issues. Carol Moats Tomer and Mary Olsen, Nebraska Department of Public Welfare. Price: \$.75.